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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine methods that secondary school teachers could use to become more effective in the area of student motivation. A brief summary of previous research and writing of educators is presented, followed by a listing of characteristics exhibited by teachers who are superior in encouraging motivation and learning in all types of students. Using this set of positive values as a standard, 84 secondary school teachers who had taught at least four years and been recommended by either their principal, superintendent, or a supervisor were interviewed. Teachers were asked to state the most promising approaches or methods they would employ in motivating their students. The survey of literature on motivating students and the results of interviews and responses to the questionnaire used in this study indicate that: (1) Literature on the topic definitely indicates the secondary school teacher has responsibilities in the area of student motivation; (2) The secondary school teachers who participated in this study all indicated that the motivation of students should be an area of concern for teachers. In conclusion, capable and experienced teachers have many similar traits, characteristics, and approaches to motivating their pupils. (JD)

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MOTIVATING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

By E. Dale Davis

The primary purpose of this study was to determine methods that secondary school teachers could use to become more effective in the area of student motivation.

The author's hypothesis was that capable, experienced teachers could suggest specific ways for motivating students which would be worthy of consideration by other teachers working in secondary schools.

Significance of the Problem

Motivation of students is a problem for most teachers. Many people ask questions such as the following: "Why does Sam not study?" "Why can't Mary read better?" "Why is Bill doing so little in school when he could be doing so much more?" These are good questions, but often the real one is, "Why is it that the student does not want to study, read, or show better achievement?" If the student has little or no motivation, even a master teacher will have a difficult job teaching him.

The best motivation is self-motivation; just as the best discipline is self-discipline. Self motivation, however, is slower to develop in some students than in others, and with many it will never come at all in school unless a teacher provides the inspiration and basis for it. The awakening and development of good motives and a sense of purpose in students are most valuable services. "Our chief want in life," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson, "is somebody who shall make (persuade, cajole, inspire) us to what we can do."

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Definitions and Limitations

There are no unusual terms used in this study, but for the sake of clarity the following commonplace ones are defined.

Motivation--In this study motivation is used to refer to a driving force which causes a person to go into action and move toward an objective or goal.

Secondary school teacher--A person who teaches in a junior high school, a middle school, or a high school is a secondary school teacher.

Methods--The term methods is used to describe what the teacher can do to influence the effectiveness of learning on the part of students.

This study was conducted in September and October of 1973 and was limited to the 84 teachers interviewed and to certain printed materials found in the Fondren Library on the Southern Methodist University Campus.

Résumé of Related Literature

Since this study is concerned primarily with beliefs and practices of the teachers being studied, only a brief summary of some of the previous research and writings of educators will be presented.

Motivating slow learners--Teachers can motivate the slow learners by using goals that are immediate and tangible.(1) Meaningfulness of material being studied by slow learners is enhanced when concrete activities and demonstrations are used.(2) Teachers should show them how to do things and then give them time and opportunities for practice, remembering always to give them things to read that are within their vocabulary. Supervisors and principals can help teachers secure such materials for each particular subject area. Slow learners will become frustrated, indifferent, and often boisterous if they are asked to master materials they cannot read.(3)

The learning situation should be structured carefully and directions made clear and simple for slow learners. Frequent drill and review should be used while employing as many different ways as possible to promote interest. The use of a logical sequence for slow learners is encouraged as they understand content much better when there is continuity of experience.(4)

Slow learners often need more encouragement than the average or gifted ones. They also need an atmosphere of patience and understanding supplied by the teachers. Usually slow learners have suffered much failure and many frustrations; consequently, they may give up or become very discouraged if they feel their teachers are not sympathetic.(5)

The slow learners' attention span can be increased by using variety in methods and activities. When asked to do a quiet or routine task for an extended period of time, they may get very restless. Breaking up a long class period by shifting from one activity to another helps hold their attention. They should have a chance to move around often.(6)

Slow learners should learn to think. How can they be motivated to do this? Teachers can give them help in analyzing situations and show them how to evaluate information. Something as simple as an exercise of underlining the facts in an advertisement after discussing the concepts of fact and opinion will help the students make decisions more effectively. They can be led to see several possible solutions. Teachers should clarify concepts for slow learners and show them how to apply those concepts to real situations; for example, promptness to job situations, mechanical concepts to automobiles, mathematics to situations in everyday life.(7)

Motivating the average and above average student--According to Inlow and other authorities, teachers can motivate the average and above average students by adapting many of the suggested approaches stated above, but the following specific suggestions gathered from educational literature should be very helpful with these two groups.(8)

1. See that average and above average students spend some time in the periodic evaluation of their own work.(9)
2. Use more independent study and individual work with these two groups.(10)
3. Use many resource materials with them.(11)
4. Place special emphasis on independent reading skills.(12)
5. Give more opportunities for the choice of projects and enrichment activities.(13)
6. Encourage more experimentation and exploration based on student ideas.(14)
7. Use more lessons organized around a problem or a purpose.(15)
8. Get students involved with planning "some" of the course work--at least they should be aware of what the expected learnings and major objectives are.(16)
9. Capitalize on the ability of these students to discriminate, illustrate, observe, report, rearrange, organize, transfer, draw conclusions, discover principles, generalize, and reason.(17)
10. Work for increasing awareness of the objectives and importance of various learning processes on the part of the student.(18)

According to the Association of Classroom Teachers of the National Education Association when it comes to classroom behavior, interaction

patterns, and teaching styles, teachers who are superior in encouraging motivation and learning on the part of all types of students seem to exhibit more of the following characteristics:

1. Willingness to be flexible, to be direct or indirect, depending on the demands of the situation.
2. Ability to perceive things from the student's point of view.
3. Capacity to "persona'ize" their teaching.
4. Willingness to try out new things, to experiment.
5. Ability to ask good questions and stimulate discussion.
6. Knowledge of subject being taught and related areas.
7. Ability and willingness to provide definite study helps.
8. Capacity and willingness to encourage students.[19]

Research Procedures

The research plan used in this study involved the following steps:

1. A survey of the recent educational literature dealing with the motivation of secondary school students.
2. Interviews with 84 secondary school teachers who had taught at least four years and who had been recommended by either their principal, superintendent, or a supervisor in the system in which they worked.

During the course of the interview the teachers were asked to complete the following short questionnaire:

The Secondary School Teacher's Role in Student Motivation

1. School System_____

2. Your Sex: Male_____ Female_____

3. Number of years you have taught in secondary schools_____

4. Highest degree held_____

5. Do you feel that student motivation is or should be an area of major concern of teachers? Yes_____ No_____

6. If your answer was yes to number five above, would you take a few minutes and state on the first and second blank pages attached to this questionnaire the most promising approaches or methods to motivate their students a teacher can employ. Try to list at least five ways or methods, but do not list over ten.

The teachers responding to the questionnaire in the interview were from the following school systems:

Dallas, Texas	29
Highland Park, Dallas, Texas	5
Richardson, Texas	7
Garland, Texas	5
Tyler, Texas	5
Fort Worth, Texas	23
Nacogdoches, Texas	3
Kilgore, Texas	3
Longview, Texas	4

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data taken from the questionnaires revealed the following information. There were 31 males and 53 females in the population studied. The mean number of years of teaching experience in secondary schools for the teachers responding was 10.5 years. Seventy-nine per cent indicated they held masters' degrees, and 21 per cent stated they were holders of a bachelor's degree. All of the teachers studied checked the yes blank to the question: Do you feel that student motivation is or should be an area of major concern of teachers?

Question number six asked the teachers to state the most promising approaches or methods to motivate their students a teacher can employ. The ten approaches most often stated are given below. The exact wording of each response was carefully studied, classified, and then summarized into a general statement which would convey the meaning of the various responses even though the verbatim wording of teachers' statements could not be given here. The ten methods most often stated are given below. Number one was listed the greatest number of times; number two was the next most frequently stated; etc., on through number ten. The results are as follows:

1. Show real interest and patient concern for your students by giving them personal help when needed--listed 77 times.
2. Explain things clearly and try your best to make materials meaningful to the students--listed 74 times.
3. Relate what you are teaching to the students' lives and their goals for the future--listed 69 times.
4. Do not rush over subject matter. Try to set a reasonable pace--listed 64 times.

5. Use a variety of methods and materials, but choose each one carefully for specific purposes--listed 62 times.
6. Always plan your teaching and be well prepared. Let the students know you expect them to study and be well-prepared also--listed 61 times.
7. Make your goals and objectives very clear to students and help them reach these objectives and goals--listed 58 times.
8. Show interest and enthusiasm for the subject and materials you are trying to teach to students--listed 56 times.
9. Try to involve the students through the use of discussion, discovery approaches, individual assignments, and at times group planning--listed 53 times.
10. Use the motivations such as interest in certain subjects, desire for recognition and praise, desire to avoid failure, desire for good grades, desire to please parents, and concern for their own future that students already have--listed 49 times.

The other methods which were suggested were studied by the author, five secondary school supervisors, and a graduate class composed of 18 secondary school teachers. The suggested methods which seemed to be especially promising are listed below. They are reproduced here exactly as they were stated by the teachers who listed them in order that you, the reader, might catch some of the spirit and interest which was apparent on the part of many of the subjects answering the questions on methods for motivating students.

1. When introducing new units of work, generate interest by giving an overview to create perspective and confidence on the part of the students.
2. Try to sell every assignment. Be sure you explain it carefully. Show why you are making it and what you expect to have them learn. Do not give long-range assignments to slow learners. Such assignments are too overwhelming for them.

3. Don't just hand out information and assignments. Give pupils explanations as you give them problems to solve and questions to answer that will involve use of their knowledge as well as personal thought and judgment.
4. Put "team" spirit to work by giving problems or projects to various groups and by stimulating reasonable competition among them.
5. When working with slow learners, first determine their present level of achievement. Then build on what they really know, not on what you think they should have learned in the past. Success motivates; failure frustrates.
6. Let students know you expect performance in keeping with each pupil's ability; don't settle for anything less.
7. Try to find ways to compliment and recognize students who try hard and who do well. Students usually work harder if they know others are aware of their efforts.
8. Always be fair with tests and plan them carefully. Tests when used with reason can be important motivators. Unfair or poorly constructed tests are discouraging to students.
9. Stress the benefits of doing assignments promptly and thoroughly.
10. The teacher's own enthusiasm for his subject and the day's procedures is essential to any well-motivated class. Enthusiasm, or lethargy, can be contagious.
11. Use eye-catching bulletin boards and displays that change with each unit or major topic. Maintain a good working environment, proper temperature, light, and ventilation.
12. Do not be a slave to any one textbook. Keep your subject alive by using supplementary materials, community resources, audio-visual

aids, television programs, and resource people. Always be on the look-out for events of the moment that can tie in with your material and help build interest.

13. Don't be afraid to use occasional "hard sell" on the importance and satisfaction of achievement in this life such as the following:
    A. Examples of people in sports, literature, television, politics, science, business, etc., who overcome obstacles to achieve success. Don't use these as sermons; just tell it like it is.
    B. Down-to-realities discussions at times of the requirements for success in the world of work, in college, or most anything else in real life.
14. Often make drills and reviews into games.
15. Do your best to know, to like, and to help all of your students learn as much as possible. Often, as any intelligent and experienced teacher knows, the least lovely student needs the most love, the most discouraged needs the most encouragement, the most impatient needs the most patience.

Summary and Recommendations

Instead of the traditional summary here, the author would just like to state that the survey of related recent literature on motivating students in the secondary school and the results of his interviews with secondary school teachers and his analysis of the responses to the questionnaire used in this study seem to add up to the following:

1. Literature on the topic definitely indicates the secondary school teacher has responsibilities in the area of student motivation.
2. The secondary school teachers who participated in this study all indicated that they felt the motivation of students should be an area of concern for teachers.

3. The related literature and the results of the interviews indicate that the most effective way to motivate students is to be a teacher who can be described by the following configuration of traits:

   A. is himself highly motivated.

   B. is enthusiastic about his subject, students, and his teaching.

   C. is businesslike and expects his students to achieve.

   D. is always well prepared and his work is well organized.

   E. knows his subject well and uses a variety of approaches to make it interesting to students.

   F. gives recognition to students who try hard and to students who do well.

   G. tries to be fair, tolerant, and just with all students.

   H. enjoys working with secondary school students.

   I. is a friendly person but tries to get his students to work hard.

   J. is a person who is patient with students.

   K. is a teacher who explains things well.

The author believes his hypothesis, that capable, experienced teachers could suggest specific ways for motivating students which would be worthy of consideration by other teachers working in secondary schools, was verified in this particular study with the specific group of teachers involved.

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